

# Does It Stack? (Part One)

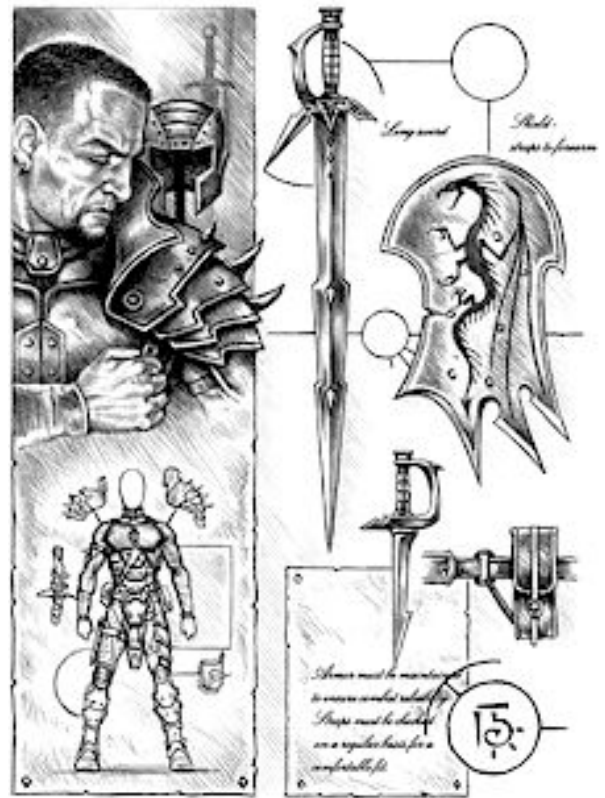
By Skip Williams

Players being what they are, a DM can sometimes face a bewildering array of magical effects. For example, a stalwart member of your party wears *gauntlets of ogre power*, a +2 *chainmail*, a heavy shield, a *ring of protection* +1, and *boots of striding and springing*. Assuming the character in question is a human with a Strength score of 16 and a Dexterity score of 13, what is the character's initiative, speed, Armor Class, attack bonus, and Reflex save bonus after receiving or using the spells *aid*, *barkskin*, *bull's strength*, *cat's grace*, *doom*, *expeditious retreat*, *mage armor*, *prayer*, *shield*, and *shield of faith*?

If this question makes your head spin, you can relax. The answers are right in the descriptions for the spells and items mentioned.

## The Language of Bonuses

Handling some of the trickiest parts of the **D&D** game becomes second nature if you learn the terminology associated with them. Our example deals with a plethora of bonuses that a character has amassed; fortunately for us, the terminology that describes bonuses is one of the most powerful tools the game provides to DMs and players. For a discussion of the most common bonuses in the game, see the Bonus Types section in Chapter 2 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.



The first step in untangling the Gordian knot of bonuses in our example involves looking up the descriptions of the various items and spells and finding the names of all those bonuses. So, let's do that:

- The *gauntlets of ogre power* provide a +2 enhancement bonus to Strength (from the item description in Chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).
- Chainmail provides a +5 armor bonus to Armor Class (Table 7-6 in the *Player's Handbook*). The armor has a +2 enhancement bonus, which increases the armor bonus it provides to +7 (from the discussion of magic armor in Chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).
- A heavy shield provides a +2 shield bonus to Armor Class (Table 7-6 in the *Player's Handbook*).
- The *ring of protection* +1 provides a +1 deflection bonus to Armor Class (from the item description in Chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).
- The *boots of striding and springing* provide an enhancement bonus of +10 feet to speed, and a competence bonus of +5 to Jump checks (from the item description in Chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

- The *aid* spell provides a +1 morale bonus on attack rolls and saving throws against fear effects, plus 1d8 +1 per caster level temporary hit points, to a maximum of 1d8+10 temporary hit points (from the spell description in the *Player's Handbook*).
- The *barkskin* spell provides a +2 enhancement bonus to the recipient's natural armor, with additional +1 for every three caster levels above 3rd, to a maximum of +5 at caster level 12th (from the spell description in the *Player's Handbook*). We'll assume +2 for this example. Since the recipient is a human with a natural armor bonus of +0, this spell increases the character's natural armor bonus to +2.
- The *bull's strength* spell provides a +4 enhancement bonus to the subject's Strength score (from the spell description in the *Player's Handbook*).
- The *cat's grace* spell provides a +4 enhancement bonus to the subject's Dexterity score (from the spell description in the *Player's Handbook*).
- The *doom* spell imposes the shaken condition on the subject. A shaken character has a -2 penalty on attack rolls, skill checks, ability checks, and saving throws (from the spell description in the *Player's Handbook* and the glossary in the *Player's Handbook*).
- The *expeditious retreat* spell provides an enhancement bonus of +30 feet to the subject's base land speed (from the spell description in the *Player's Handbook*).
- The *mage armor* spell provides a +4 armor bonus to the recipient's Armor Class (from the spell description in the *Player's Handbook*).
- The *prayer* spell gives the subject a +1 luck bonus on attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, saves, and skill checks, while imposing a +1 penalty when a foe makes such rolls (from the spell description in the *Player's Handbook*).
- The *shield* spell provides a +4 shield bonus to the recipient's Armor Class and negates *magic missile* attacks directed at the subject (from the spell description in the *Player's Handbook*).
- The *shield of faith* spell provides a +2 deflection bonus to the subject's Armor Class, with an additional bonus of +1 per six caster levels, to a maximum of +5 (from the spell description in the *Player's Handbook*). We'll assume +2 for this example.

## Rules Governing Bonuses

The basic rule to remember when combining two or more bonuses is this: two or more bonuses of different type stack, and two or more bonuses of the same type overlap. In general, a bonus's name indicates its type. A bonus with no name has no type and it stacks with any other bonus, but not with itself.

## Stacking and Overlapping

What's stacking and overlapping? I'm glad you asked.

When two or more bonuses stack, they're cumulative and you add their effects. If you stack two +1 bonuses, you get a +2 bonus.

When two or more bonuses overlap, they're not cumulative and you use only the highest bonus. You don't

add the effects, but they don't go away either. If one of whatever gives you an overlapping bonus goes away, the other might still be around to take up the slack. Of course, there are some exceptions to this rule, and we'll look at those later, but for now let's just try to answer our original question.

## Speed

Our example human has a base speed of 30 feet. In chainmail, that drops to 20 feet (see Table 7-6 in the *Player's Handbook*).

The character has two enhancement bonuses to speed (+10 feet from the *boots of striding and springing* and +30 feet from the *expeditious retreat* spell). Since they're both enhancement bonuses, they overlap, and the character can use only the higher bonus. Obviously, the +30 feet from the *expeditious retreat* spell is the speed bonus to use, but how does that interact with the reduced speed from the chainmail?

Always apply increases to a speed before making any adjustments for armor or encumbrance (see Tactical Movement, in Chapter 8 of the *Player's Handbook*). The *expeditious retreat* spell adds +30 feet to our human's base speed of 30 feet, which yields a speed of 60 feet, which chainmail reduces to 40 feet (see Armor and Encumbrance in Chapter 2 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). The boots are still working, however, so when the *expeditious retreat* spell ends the character still has a slight speed increase. The character's base speed is still 30 feet, +10 from the boots, which chainmail reduces to 30 feet (also from Armor and Encumbrance in Chapter 2 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

## Coming in Part Two of Does It Stack?

Skip goes over the Armor Class improvements of the example character.

---

## About the Author

**Skip Williams** keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and has been the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* since 1986. Skip is a codesigner of the **D&D** 3rd edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden. (His borscht gets rave reviews.)

Based on the original **Dungeons & Dragons®** game by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and on the new edition of the **Dungeons & Dragons** game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison. **D&D**, **Dungeons & Dragons**, and **Forgotten Realms** are registered trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All Wizards characters, character names, and the distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This material is protected under the laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction of or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental. This Wizards of the Coast game product contains no Open Game Content. No portion of this work may be reproduced in any form without written permission. To learn more about the Open Gaming License and the d20 System License, please visit **[www.wizards.com/d20](http://www.wizards.com/d20)**. ©2001-2004 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. All rights reserved. Made in the U.S.A.

**Visit our website at [www.wizards.com/dnd](http://www.wizards.com/dnd)**